

CAPITOL UPDATE 2012

Veterans

Desecrating Veterans' Memorials

Honoring the present and past sacrifices of our veterans is one of my highest priorities. It is shocking to see an increase in thefts and vandalism of veterans' memorials. We increased penalties for desecrating veterans' memorials beyond the monetary value of what was vandalized.

CT Veterans Charity Network

Fraudulent charity groups often misrepresent veterans, trying to take advantage of our good will toward those who serve our country. We helped protect consumers from these fraudulent groups by creating a legitimate charities list on the Department of Veterans' Affairs website.

Diversionary programs for Vets with PTSD & Legal Issues

So many of our service men and women return home and face a variety of challenges, not the least of which are legal issues and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. A federally funded pilot program for veterans dealing with these issues is helpful but limited, so we expanded the program to more locations throughout the state.

Custody Orders While on Deployment

In order to reduce the psychological trauma a parent feels when they leave a small child for an extended period of time, we protected parents' permanent custody orders in the event of deployment. We provided an opportunity for the military parent to create temporary custody orders that remain in effect only as long as they are away on deployment and for as much contact as possible between children and the parent who is absent while on military duty by providing contact by phone or email.



Mae donates items to the South Park Inn veterans' shelter.

State Representative

Mae Flexer

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Dear Neighbor:

From jobs to education to improved response to natural disasters, the legislature helped citizens across our state in many ways in 2012.

It started last October when we passed comprehensive, bipartisan jobs legislation that invested hundreds of millions of dollars in small businesses, gave firms hiring incentives, aligned education programs with jobs-in-demand, encouraged entrepreneurship and innovation, and eliminated red-tape for growing companies.

This spring, we balanced a budget by keeping our funding promise to cities and towns without raising taxes. Historic changes were made to our educational system so our children can succeed. We made it easier for people to exercise voting rights, and demanded that utility companies respond better when storms and crises hit.

In addition, I worked on several bills that address domestic violence and protecting victims. For the past three years it has been my privilege to be Chair of the Task Force on Domestic Violence. We made important and substantial changes in the process of updating these statutes.

I hope this report is informative. I'm happy to answer any questions about these issues or any others. Please feel free to contact me anytime.

Sincerely,

Mae Flexer



State Representative

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Legislative Office Building

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Hospice Care

We gave smaller hospice facilities the opportunity to provide high quality services that allow patients to stay closer to family and friends. With just two licensed hospices in the state, this new law will permit hospices to follow federal standards. This bill will help our state to ensure that residents have access to health care services across the full continuum of care.

Price Gouging and Pain at the Pump

Rising gasoline prices are a result of global factors such as growing demand from expanding economies such as China, turmoil in the Middle East and oil market speculators. Faced with this reality, the legislature acted in a bipartisan manner to be a part of the solution, by capping the state petroleum gross receipts tax on gasoline and enacting new price gouging laws to protect consumers from oil companies and gasoline dealers that try to exploit abnormal market conditions for profit.

Education Reform

Our education initiative will provide new support to help turn around underperforming schools. The education reform package has long-term implications for our children and for the state’s economic well-being. The better we prepare children for the 21st Century workforce, the stronger we’ll make Connecticut’s economy. Your input from the survey I mailed out earlier this year was useful in letting us know what mattered. The bill:

- Includes more funding for school-based health centers and family resource centers
- Recognizes the critical importance of early childhood education by underwriting 1,000 school readiness slots for preschoolers and funding initiatives to improve early reading success
- Creates the Commissioner’s Network, to provide the intensive supports and interventions needed to turn around 25 of the most chronically low-performing schools
- Gives the state commissioner of education the authority to develop or modify plans with teachers and parents at “turnaround” schools

Encouraging Job Growth

We continued the state’s commitment to job growth and economic recovery with new legislation during special session that expands the Small Business Express Program, allowing an estimated 3,600 additional businesses to have access to state funding. The program allows small businesses to access much-needed funding for capital investments and hiring.

- In addition, the bill:
- Establishes the Unemployed Armed Forces Member STEP-UP (Subsidized Training and Employment Program) with grants to subsidize a business’s cost of hiring unemployed veterans during their first 180 days (about six months) on the job
 - Creates the “Connecticut Made” and “Connecticut Treasures” programs to promote products made in Connecticut and promote the state’s cultural, educational and historic attractions
 - Develops a plan to allow the state to give preferential incentives and economic development assistance to companies that will relocate jobs from overseas to Connecticut



Mae meets with students from Killingly High School.

Storm Response and Power Outages

The aftermath of the October Nor’easter and Tropical Storm Irene left much of the state without power, especially our area of the state. This is why I sent a survey out to gauge how you feel about prospective storm response and prevention actions we could take. The legislature passed sweeping reforms to better prepare for future severe storms and avoid wide-spread and lengthy loss of utility service, where:

- Utilities will be held to minimum performance standards for emergency preparation and response
- Noncompliance could result in penalties of up to 2.5 percent of an electric or gas company’s annual distribution revenue, approximately \$25 million in the case of Connecticut Light & Power

Reducing Domestic Violence

We have made great progress in helping families affected by domestic violence in recent years, but the problem persists in our communities. Building on earlier successes, this year we strengthened the state’s laws to better protect victims, hold abusers accountable, and give new tools to law enforcement by:

- Improving access to and enforcement of protective and restraining orders
- Giving police officers new tools, including a model policy for responding to domestic violence incidents
- Allowing victims to report email and texting violations of restraining and protective orders in the town where they reside, where they receive the communication or where the communication was initiated
- Extending the maximum length of restraining orders from six months to one year
- Ordering a feasibility study for a 911 texting system
- Requiring the courts to share protective orders with the school that a victim attends, upon request of a victim
- Strengthening the definition of stalking to ensure that stalking incidents—including digital stalking—are appropriately punished



Mae speaks out about domestic violence legislation.